

BIG CHIMNEYS PARK MASTER PLAN

I. Introduction & Background

In 1999, City Council passed a resolution resolving to initiate a master planning process for each park in the City. Since then master plans have been created for Frady Park, Cherry Hill Park, Madison Park, Roberts Park, Cavalier Trail Park, Crossman Park, Lincoln Park, Berman Park, the Hamlett/Rees Tract Park and West End Park. The next park to receive a master plan will be Big Chimneys Park.

Big Chimneys Park, located between Gibson Street and West Annandale Road near the intersection of South Maple Avenue and West Annandale Road, is approximately 1.2 acres in size.

The completion of a master plan is normally done before a park is developed. In Falls Church most of the existing parks have already been at least partially developed. Therefore, the purpose for creating park master plans for City parks, like Big Chimneys Park, is not to begin the development process. Rather it is to accurately list existing park facilities, protect and preserve the City's open space and guide future development of the park, which is critical given the proposed development of land adjacent to Big Chimneys Park. Future development will significantly impact the Park. The Big Chimneys Park Master Plan, which will lead to the creation of a site plan for the park, attempts to minimize the impact on the park.

The first step in the process for developing a Master Plan for Big Chimneys Park was to conduct two public hearing to gather information and suggestions from the citizens of Falls Church. The hearings for Big Chimneys Park were held on March 7, 2007 and April 4, 2007. Using the input from these two meetings as a guide a Conceptual Development Plan for Big Chimneys Park was developed and presented to the community on May 9, 2007. Comments received during the public hearing process, the purpose for the park, the desired future visitor experience and park themes establish important guidelines for the Master Plan.

The Big Chimneys Park Master Plan describes the current amenities in the park, and makes recommendations for the preservation and future development of the park.

A. Park Purpose

1. Preserve and protect natural resources
2. Provide a variety of passive and active recreational activities for all age groups.

B. Desired Future Visitor Experience

1. Visitors will be able to participate in a number of passive and active recreational activities.
2. Visitors will be able to learn more about the history of the area and Big Chimneys Cabin
3. Visitors will be able to enjoy cultural events

C. Park Themes

1. Neighborhood Park (active and passive recreation)
2. Community Park (active and passive recreation)
3. Special Events Park (venue for small special or cultural events)

D. Property Description

Big Chimneys Park is named to commemorate the Big Chimneys Cabin, which was built on the site now used for the park, in 1699, the year traditionally cited as the date of settlement in Falls Church. The Cabin is considered to be the first known European-American home in Falls Church.

As previously noted, Big Chimneys Park is located between Gibson Street and West Annandale Road, near the intersection of West Annandale Road and South Maple Avenue. If a proposed development plan for land adjacent to the park is approved, Shirley Street will be extended to run the length of the park from Gibson Street to Annandale Road. The extended portion of the street will border the eastern edge of the park. Big Chimneys Park's historical significance and close proximity to the proposed City Center development make it a unique park in the City's park system. Numerous trees, landscaped beds, and an open grassy area help make this park an attractive and valuable asset to the City.

Public access to the park is currently available from Annandale Road, Gibson Street, and two locations on the western border of the park along the Winter Hill Development.

E. Park Designation

Big Chimneys Park has been designated in the City's Comprehensive Plan as a Neighborhood Park. Neighborhood parks are basically "walk to" parks, primarily serving the surrounding neighborhood. The service area

of such parks is usually about one-quarter of a mile and the visits are usually short term.

While Big Chimneys Park currently only serves as a Neighborhood Park, the numerous entrance points to the park and the potential for holding small cultural events in the park and adjacent to the park on Shirley Street, create the potential for the park to also serve as a Community Park. Community Parks are parks that serve the entire City of Falls Church and are often “drive to” or “bike to” parks. In addition, the fact that the park will be adjacent to the City Center development provides an excellent opportunity to create an open, visually attractive green space in the center of the City.

The amenities at Big Chimneys Park facilitate their use for passive leisure.

The open area of the park is ideal for informal active recreation

F. Existing Facilities/Amenities

1. Open, semi-level grassy area
2. Walking trail
3. Playground equipment
4. Benches
5. Picnic table
6. Barbecue grill
7. Big Chimneys footprint
8. Interpretive sign

II. Description of the Conceptual Development Plan Elements

A. Elimination of Existing Facilities

None of the existing facilities will be eliminated. However, the following facilities will be removed and replaced with improved versions.

1. Paved Trail
2. Playground Equipment

B. New Plan Elements

1. Park Access

An access point off of the new section of Shirley Street will be added.

2. Landscape Beds and Gardens

Landscaped beds, will be established throughout the park with emphasis on the entrances to the park and adjacent to the Winter Hill Townhouses,

Gibson Street, and Shirley Street. These beds will feature a mix of native shrubs, perennials, flowers and trees to provide an array of colors throughout the year.

3. New Sign and Entryway

A new park sign will be installed and as noted above an entryway to the park established off of the new section of Shirley Street.

4. Landscape Buffers

Landscape buffers will be installed along the perimeter of the park on all sides of the park with particular emphasis on the western and southern boundaries of the park. Buffering may be critical along the park's boundary with Shirley and Gibson streets depending on what is placed on the other side of Shirley and Gibson streets away from the park. The landscaping is to buffer the park and homes from the noise, environmental impact and sight lines of potential commercial/residential development on Shirley and Gibson streets. Existing desirable and healthy trees and shrubs along the boundaries will be saved where possible and incorporated into the new landscape plan for the park.

5. Benches and Tables

A few additional benches and tables will be installed in various locations in the park. The tables will be suitable for picnicking, completing homework, or playing board games.

6. Water Fountain

A water fountain or fountains may be added to the park depending upon the final design in the site plan.

8. Drinking Fountain

A drinking fountain will be added to the park.

9. Performance Area

Using the natural contours of the park a slope can be used for spectators to sit and listen and watch musicians perform on a level area located at the base of the slope.

10. Lighting

Lighting will be added along the park path and at the entryways to the park by adding aesthetically appropriate light poles and fixtures.

11. Event Thoroughfare

Examine the feasibility of constructing the new portion of Shirley Street so that it can easily accommodate small City events.

C. Enhancements

1. Open Space

The small open space in Big Chimneys Park will be maintained and left open for informal active and passive recreational activities.

Consideration should be given to expanding the open space in the Park by increasing the size of the park through the acquisition of adjacent land. For example, if development occurs to the south side of the park, proffers of land may be possible along the southern edge of the park, or elsewhere as development discussions continue.

2. Playground Equipment

New playground equipment will be installed that is accessible. The surfacing under the play equipment will be a rubber mat that improves accessibility.

3. Trail

The current trail will be removed and a new one installed that will circle the center of the park leaving more of the park open for informal active and passive uses. The trail will be constructed using a pervious surface.

4. Trees

Native trees will be planted in the park to replace any trees that are removed or lost during construction.

5. Invasive Plant Removal

Invasive plants such as poison ivy and English ivy will be removed and replaced with appropriate plantings or grass.

6. Grading and Drainage

The park will require grading to address significant drainage problems. In addition, grading will be done to open up the view to the park from West Annandale Road. During the grading process an archaeological dig should be conducted to search for artifacts of historical significance.

7. Entryways

Special attention will be given to make the primary entryways to the park more open, visible and attractive through lighting, landscaping and grading.

8. Historical Interpretation

The Big Chimneys Cabin is a major historical landmark in the City and must be clearly acknowledged in the park through interpretive signage, a monument or with the construction of the footprint of the cabin similar to the one now in the park.

D. Open Space

In accordance with the City's Comprehensive Plan, which states that "the City will conserve and maintain existing parks, open space and natural resources," the park and the open space in the park will be preserved.

If land adjacent to Big Chimneys Park should become available, acquisition should be considered to increase the size of the park. Parks and open green spaces are critical to the vitality and life of the area as development occurs throughout the City's business corridors.

E. Conclusion

Big Chimneys Park has served the neighborhood well for over 20 years. The proposed City Center Development, that will include parcels of land immediately adjacent to the Park, will have a dramatic impact on the area and the Park. The Master Plan attempts to address those pending changes and minimize their impact on the experience of the park visitor. More importantly the plan attempts to improve Big Chimneys Park by making it more accessible, visible, and attractive. Landscaped beds with an assortment of native plantings will provide year round color and natural beauty. The park will be made safer and more inviting and the grade and drainage issues that have plagued the park for years will be addressed.

The historical significance of the park and its name will be appropriately highlighted and noted through interpretive signage and other means. The small grass covered area in the middle of the park should be maintained as is, to allow for informal active and passive recreational uses.

The Park is currently zoned B-2 which is for business use. The B-2 zoning district is not appropriate for a park. The City's current Zoning Ordinance does not have a "park" zoning district. Over the next two years the City will be reviewing its Zoning Ordinance. During that review the feasibility of creating a "park" zoning district will be examined. If the zone is created, Big Chimneys Park should be zoned as a park to further protect it from development. If a "park" zoning district is not established the City should rezone Big Chimneys Park to R1B to be consistent with other park zoning.

Adopted June 6, 2007